Great institution. Because of all that, Levmore’s successor as dean, Michael Schill, has observed, “In a world where most law schools converge to a common model, the University of Chicago Law School remains distinctive. It is an institution singularly committed to intellectual pursuit.”

Here we review some of the many changes that Dean Levmore has undertaken during his tenure.

Faculty in the Age of Free Agency
Twenty-one members of the current faculty have joined since Levmore became Dean in 2001. That number of hirings reflects the high levels of job mobility now available to superior legal scholars. Today’s marketplace for top academic talent has been described in many places as similar to the competition for professional sports stars. (“It’s starting to feel like major league baseball,” the dean of Columbia’s law school recently remarked.)

While Chicago has retained many of the core senior faculty who have solidified and strengthened its reputation in past years, it has also attracted many scholars who will secure its quality for many years to come. Earlier this year Levmore characterized the current situation as follows: “A faculty that is ten to fifteen years younger than Harvard’s and Yale’s and yet has a comparable number of members in the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and certainly an equivalent record of important publications.”
Chicago trails only Yale in the percentage of full-time, tenure-track academic faculty elected to one of the scholarly sections of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and a recent report concludes that Chicago also topped all other law schools except Yale in the scholarly impact of faculty members during the period 2004 to 2008. In the controversial but nonetheless important rankings by U.S. News & World Report in 2009, Chicago retains the position it held when Levmore assumed his deanship, sixth overall and behind only three other schools with regard to its reputation among lawyers and judges. It is expected to climb this year because of higher scores and, for better or worse, more spending over the last two years.

Levmore has characterized the Law School’s 2008 faculty hirings as “the most stunning hiring year of any law school in the country,” and he underscored how fertile the Law School’s intellectual culture is when he noted regarding new associate professor Aziz Huq, “I have assigned him to an office next door to Geof Stone and, going down the hallway, near Andy Rosenfield, Lisa Bernstein, Randy Picker, Bill Landes, Richard Epstein, and Jake Gersen. There cannot possibly be a better learning environment in academia.”

Faculty return the compliment. As assistant professor Todd Henderson has said, “Every member of our faculty is better at what they do because of Saul Levmore’s passion for ideas, his dogged pursuit of good arguments, and his playful creativity. If the measure of a dean is the intellectual atmosphere they help create, Levmore is unrivaled in the American academy.”

It can be expected that the already-high quality and impact of the Law School’s faculty—faculty who, in Levmore’s words, “find time to do more teaching, and higher quality teaching, than any other important law faculty”—will continue to rise. But it also takes superb students to make a law school attractive to great faculty—particularly to the kind of faculty for which Chicago always has been envied: the kind who, beyond producing important new ideas, care deeply about interactions with students in the classroom and beyond it.

**Reaching the Finest Students**

Student quality has objective dimensions, and it is worth noting that the class that began its studies at the Law School this year sported record numbers for the Law School in the two most commonly assessed categories, with a median LSAT score of 171 and a median grade point average of 3.76. Levmore’s success at attracting applicants is also attested to by the fact that during his tenure Chicago has experienced growth in the number of applicants for admission in years when most other law schools were just holding steady, and stability in the number of applicants in years when others were declining. This year, for example, applications to the Law School were up seven percent, while they were flat at most other law schools.

Numbers matter, but quality matters more. As Levmore has stated, “This place is not like all others, and one of our tasks is to attract to it the sorts of people who will thrive here.” He has noted that a new generation of students, the “millennials,” now populates the student body. Among other things, they are often highly attached to their communication and information technologies, and Levmore has led the initiation of practices to communicate with prospective students through those technologies. At his instigation, Chicago was the first law school to create a faculty-moderated blog at its website. Although the blog admirably serves many constituencies, prospective students can easily turn to it—as they do—for a sense of the Law School’s intellectual life. Podcasts, also available at the
website, make lunchtime faculty talks and other elements of the school’s intellectual life widely available. Prospective students can tour the Law School with iPod-based tours that communicate its unique qualities and its history of contributions to legal scholarship and practice. Admitted students receive flash drives full of information that helps define the ways in which this place is not like all others.

Levmore faced up to a technology-related dilemma when he decided in 2008, after extensive discussions with faculty and students, to disable wireless access in classrooms. “I am convinced,” he explained, “that the negative externalities associated with what (I will generously call) multitasking [in the classroom] threaten the core of what we do. This has happened at many other law schools and it must not happen here.”

Perhaps most importantly, Levmore has sought since the beginning of his deanship to change the tenor of student life without changing its nature. Cass Sunstein, who chaired the search committee that selected Levmore for the job, forecast, “I think he will do a great job at making student life joyful, which is not what the University of Chicago is famous for.” The Law School’s renovated physical facility, its expanded career counseling services, and other investments not directly related to classroom learning are all responsive to some of things students now expect from a top-flight law school. Because the best students “will choose a law school that spoils them a bit,” Levmore led the accomplishment of those things, which, he has said, “seemed un-Chicago twenty or thirty years ago.”

“We have learned,” he has said, “that there was little demand for a boot camp experience and that we needed to abandon our extreme, somewhat monastic market niche in order to attract the best students and faculty.”

Richard Badger, ’68, Assistant Dean for the LLM Program, recounts this story that illustrates much about Levmore’s relationship to student life: “Shortly after Saul became Dean I suggested to him that he and Julie might consider hosting a Super Bowl party for our LLM students—part of their American culture education. He said that they would be happy to do it, and he wanted the students to come an hour before the game began so that we could all play some touch football in the park near his home. I reminded him that this would be during the coldest part of the Chicago winter. ‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘but it will help them understand the game!’ Ever since then, this has been one of the highlights of our students’ year at the Law School.”

**New Looks**

Seeing students’ reactions to the Law School’s renovated classroom wing in 2004, Levmore knew that the school was succeeding at becoming the kind of place that students and faculty would enjoy. “I wish you could see the huge smiles of our returning students and alumni as they see the revitalized rooms and descend down the familiar stairs to the seminar level,” he wrote to alumni and friends then. Natural lighting, attractive decor, and comfortable furniture highlighted the lower level; the classrooms were fully enabled for technology, with improved lighting, acoustics, seating arrangements, heating, and cooling (the latter systems “rescued from near death,” in the dean’s words). The once bare white walls—monastic walls—were enlivened with vivid, challenging artworks loaned to the Law School through the generosity of alumni and a foundation.

Associate Dean for Administration Karen Ashfari was a witness to one way in which Levmore’s commitment to an excellent environment combined with his determination and his persuasiveness: “One Friday afternoon, after most workers had gone home, Saul decided that we really needed to cover the masonry walls in the seminar rooms with drywall to warm them up and make them feel complete. He somehow convinced the project manager and the contractor that this could be done over the weekend. Sure enough, when everyone arrived Monday morning, the
walls in all five seminar rooms had been drywalled, taped, sanded, and painted."

When the classroom work was completed, attention turned to the Law School’s central tower and the D’Angelo Law Library within it. The tower has been transformed into a comfortable, technologically accessible, student-friendly space, with ample areas for individual and group study. Judith Wright, associate dean for library and information services, observes, "The renovated library is Eero Saarinen’s original great design with twenty-first-century lighting, study space, and wiring—and it is still the only law library in the country where students and faculty share the same space." The library renovation was recognized by Landmarks Illinois with the 2008 Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Preservation Award for Rehabilitation.

In one of the most dramatic changes in the library, an inviting suite of offices places the most-used student services in a single location. Assistant Dean for Admissions Ann Perry has noted: “The colocation of core student services accomplished two of Dean Levmore’s most important goals. Most obviously, it made it easier for students to access those services—and making such tasks less onerous for students has always been a high priority for him. Less evidently, it also made it easier for the various administrative providers of student services to work together across functions to reduce any obstacles to smoothly meeting students’ needs. To me, this is a good example of Dean Levmore’s approach to many of his responsibilities: finding ways to make things better not just directly, on the surface, but at deeper operational levels as well. I might add that in a rather calculated way, he used the occasion of our move into these nice offices as a way of transforming our Admissions office into one of the first paperless operations in the country; he brought change by simply crossing out rooms and rooms of file cabinets.”

The recently completed redesign of the Law School’s courtyard and reflecting pool also won prestigious recognition: the President’s Award of the National Society of Landscape Architects. The project architect for the courtyard stated, “I think the Law School is a modern masterpiece. Once something falls in that category of landmark, you want to respect that. In some sense, it ought to look like we’ve done nothing there.” Of the overall Law School facilities, Levmore wrote to alumni: “If you remember an intimate,
collegial atmosphere, then be assured that none of that will disappear. But if you recall some coldness and malfunctioning infrastructure, then be assured that we are well on our way to improving the best Law School that an active and imaginative mind could want.”

What Deans Think About
In one of the dean’s regular letters to alumni and friends, he observed:

There are three things that deans think about all day, every day: resources, the quality of the educational experience we provide to our students, and faculty sustenance. A skeptic might say that this is really one thing: the Dean thinks about fundraising and assumes that the other concerns will follow the money. An idealist also might say that these three subjects are one because a satisfied and well-trained student body will eventually show its loyalty with financial support and that, along with the pleasures of teaching terrific students, will keep the faculty happy. Either way (and in different ways entirely) resources play an important role in enabling a great school to thrive and realize its potential.

In that letter, he announced the receipt of what was at that time the largest gift ever received by a law school from a law firm, over $7 million from Law School graduates at Kirkland & Ellis. Students in the top five percent of their graduating classes now earn the designation of Kirkland & Ellis Scholar.

Many other substantial gifts—including new endowed professorships established by the Sidley Austin law firm; Gerald Ratner, ’37; and Barbara Fried, ’57, and Mark Fried, ’56—demonstrate the love of the Law School shared among alumni and friends, and the confidence in Dean Levmore (and future deans) to continue making it a better place.

The largest undertaking of the dean’s tenure was the Centennial Capital Campaign, which exceeded its $100 million goal and permitted many of the dramatic improvements to facilities to be accomplished without taking on debt (“a fact that distinguishes us from most other law schools,” the dean has observed).

Diligent resource acquisition has also helped bring an important goal closer to full realization: the capacity to underwrite public interest work by students and graduates. Levmore has spoken often of the propriety of this goal in a day when the heavy debt loads of graduates may discourage
lower-paying public interest practice, and of its strategic importance for recruiting the best candidates. The Hormel Public Interest Program, through the generous support of James Hormel, ’58, provides substantial loan forgiveness and repayment for graduates who undertake public interest roles, and funding from the Bernard Heerey Family Foundation makes loan support available to students who perform public interest work (including work for governmental entities) for at least four weeks in the summer following their first year.

Abbie Willard, Associate Dean for Career Services and Policy Initiatives, describes the effect on student career choices that Dean Levmore’s resource acquisitions have had: “We have witnessed an increase in the number of applicants attracted to the University of Chicago Law School because we offer a loan forgiveness program with unique and generous provisions, but equally important, we have experienced a dramatic increase in the number of students who are able to pursue these career options both in their summers and after they receive their degree. In one year the percentage of 1Ls seeking public sector employment increased from 38% to 53% and the percentage of 2Ls increased from 4% to 11%. This would not—could not—be happening without Dean Levmore’s commitment in this area.”

Not all is perfect regarding resources, particularly in light of recent financial perturbations that have harmed the Law School’s and the University’s endowments and that have made current and prospective students less certain of the high-paying firm jobs that were virtually ensured to all who wanted them in the past. A major unfinished task that will fall to future leadership (and the future generosity of alumni and friends) is strengthening the Law School’s ability to provide sufficient financial aid to attract the best students.

Learning Inside and Outside the Classroom

Of course, the Law School’s primary purpose is to prepare careful, imaginative, rigorous, ethical future lawyers. At Chicago, that preparation occurs both in the classroom and—perhaps more than at any other law school—beyond the classroom.

Where to begin to recount the adjustments and wholesale alterations that have begun during Dean Levmore’s service? He himself expresses great pride in the blossoming of Chicago’s international law and comparative law offerings, referring earlier this year to “a faculty and curriculum that have globalized; we are now rich in international law and increasingly conversant in comparative materials and approaches.” “I anticipate a Chicago ‘School’ of International Law,” he has forecast, “that will be as well known as our Law and Economics group.” Opportunities for students to work and learn abroad, and the recruitment of international students and faculty, have been significantly increased, in part by such generous gifts as the one from Jack D. Beem, ’55, which is described in this issue of The Record.

Last year the Law School introduced a new case-based ethics seminar, developed by associate dean David Zarfes in consultation with many experienced lawyers. As the article about the seminar in this issue of The Record explains, the seminar takes a distinctive approach in that it asks students to examine ethical questions from the vantage point of the client as well as the practitioner. Levmore says the seminar exemplifies “our penchant for experimenting exactly where others schools are at their dullest.” Writing requirements have been rethought, too, so that there is now more emphasis on honing skills through one-on-one interactions between students and faculty, focused on scholarly research.

The grading system underwent a revision in 2003 to make it more easily intelligible to the many outside bodies, domestic and overseas, with an interest in graduates’ performance. That accommodation illustrated the dean’s capacity to make change without revolution: it added a 1 in front of grades without altering the grading structure. The 1, the dean reported, serves as “a flag so that readers
will not think on a 100 scale, even as it serves to make
comparison of new grades and old grades simple for those
of us who know the system well.”

Levmore approached the Law School’s clinical programs
with the deft appreciation of the complex dynamics of
change that he demonstrated in so many endeavors.
Potential students would often bristle at the relative scarcity
of clinical opportunities at Chicago, particularly compared
to some of its top-tier competitors. And many alumni cite
their clinical experiences as having been formative. But
Levmore, while expanding clinical slots by adding two new
clinics, two new clinical projects, and four new clinical
lecturers, insisted that any additions must be consistent
with Chicago’s highest academic standards and must meet
an important community need.
The Exoneration Project and the Immigrant Children’s
Advocacy Project, for example, both existed outside the
Law School and had already achieved great respect from
practitioners and jurists before Levmore brought them
into the Law School fold. The Law School’s distinguished
alumnus Abner Mikva, ’51, headed the new Appellate
Advocacy Project, and the Federal Criminal Justice Project
that Levmore added was the first legal clinic in the country
to exclusively represent clients charged with federal
felonies, and it is one of only a few legal clinics that allow
students to appear in federal district court on behalf of
criminal defendants.

As the dean has remarked, the Law School is now, more
than ever, replete with educational offerings that constitute
“something like a second education alongside that provided
in regular courses.” He instituted the Greenberg Seminars
(funded by Daniel Greenberg, ’65, and Susan Steinhauser)
shortly after taking office: they are one-credit courses
hosted by two faculty members and conducted in the homes
of those faculty members. In this year’s fall quarter, for
example, “Gender, Power, and the Novel,” taught by Alison
LaCroix and Martha Nussbaum, and “Food Law,” taught
by Douglas Baird and Omri Ben-Shahar, were two of the
seven Greenberg Seminars—all of which are so popular
that acceptance to them is determined by lottery. The
Greenberg Seminar “Shakespeare and the Law” turned into
the conference that is described in this issue of The Record.

In the spirit of the Chicago Jury Project of the 1950s,
the Chicago Policy Initiatives program initiated by Levmore
engages students and faculty in two years of extensive
research, analysis, and the propounding of pragmatic
policy positions aimed at affecting public decision-making
about important topics. The first of those Initiatives was
the Chicago Judges Project, a comprehensive study of the
voting patterns of federal judges; other Initiatives have
examined the foster care system, the law of animal
companions, and climate change. The Chicago Policy
Initiatives have been supported by a fund established by
the Kanter Family Foundation.

In 2002, in honor of the Law School’s centennial,
Levmore introduced the Chicago’s Best Ideas lecture series,
in which faculty describe, in his words, “the great ideas
that have come out of this place and that continue to be
developed here.” More than 60 presentations have been
offered so far as part of this series.
The Law School is still a place where, as Levmore has
put it, students are “educated not just by great teachers but
also by one another.” The Friday afternoon Wine Mess,
familiar to many alumni, is still going strong, and Levmore
supplemented it with a Wednesday-morning Coffee Mess.
Dean of Students Michele Baker Richardson often
observed how Dean Levmore promoted student engagement:
“He encouraged student participation in Law School
community events including conferences, lecture series
such as Chicago’s Best Ideas, and even our trivia competition.
He always queried students—inside the classroom and in
the Green Lounge—and he was at once a catalyst for
conversations about the controversial and a wise—and often humorous—counselor to the students he encountered. Students could count on his regular presence at Coffee Mess and the annual Law School Musical, where he was always affectionately teased, as evidence of his genuine fondness for them.”

**People Foremost**

And what of you, the alumni and friends of the Law School who are reading this? From the beginning of his term until its end, Levmore has expressed admiration for the Law School’s alumni, saying in his first letter, “I cannot imagine that any other law school would claim that its graduates are as well-informed and as interesting as ours.” His affection for alumni has been palpable in all his communications.

The affection of alumni for their Law School has also been strongly in evidence, in strong attendance and enthusiasm at reunions and other core celebrations of the school and in responsiveness to the school’s financial needs. Associate Dean for External Affairs Jonathan Stern observes, “From the beginning of his tenure, Dean Levmore focused on alumni engagement. His focus increased the alumni participation rate, and the size of our Annual Fund grew in total dollars contributed; yearly reunion attendance dramatically increased and volunteerism grew; and the successful completion of the capital campaign not only helped renovate our historic building but also boosted the endowment for faculty and students.”

It is plain that to Levmore, the University of Chicago Law School is not just “traditions” and “intellectual rigor,” or facilities and grade point averages, important as those things are. It is, first and foremost, people. That understanding of him is borne out by his accomplishments, because it would have been impossible to so successfully navigate all the change that he has brought about if he did not communicate genuine caring and respect for those affected by it. Faculty and administrative staff know that he admires and appreciates them; alumni who have met him have learned the same thing. To students he has been a frequent presence in classrooms, lounges, and hallways, but even those who do not know him can see the fruits of his efforts.

“Although we ought to be proud of the many new things that our incoming Dean will find here,” Levmore recently wrote, “it is the intellectual atmosphere that continues to define us. It is all the more valuable because it is embedded in an atmosphere that is welcoming and warm.”